THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

SECOND REPORT

FOURTH SESSION, THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November 27, 2003

To the Honourable,
The Legislative Assembly of the
Province of British Columbia
Victoria, British Columbia

Honourable Members:

I have the honour to present herewith the Second Report of the Special Committee on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

The second report contains our unanimous endorsement of the selections of the Chair of the Citizen's Assembly to fill four senior staff positions.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee.

John Les, MLA
Chair

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

MEMBERS

John Les, MLA	Chair	Chilliwack-Sumas
Jeff Bray, MLA	Deputy Chair	Victoria-Beacon Hill
Ida Chong, MLA		Oak Bay-Gordon Head
Kevin Krueger, MLA		Kamloops-North Thompson
Blair Lekstrom, MLA		Peace River South
Joy MacPhail, MLA		Vancouver-Hastings
Rob Nijjar, MLA		Vancouver-Kingsway

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Craig James, Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees

COMMITTEE RESEARCHER

Jonathan Fershau, Committee Researcher

TERMS OF REFERENCE

On April 30, 2003, The Hon. Gordon Campbell, on behalf of Hon. Geoff Plant, moved that a Special Committee on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform be appointed and authorized:

(1) to review the nomination of Jack Blaney as chair of the Citizens' Assembly and to report to the Legislative Assembly whether the Special Committee unanimously endorses the said nomination;

(2) to review the chair's subsequent selections of senior staff of the Citizens' Assembly and to report to the Legislative Assembly whether the Special Committee unanimously endorses the said selections: and

(3) to receive interim reports from the chair of the Citizens' Assembly on the progress of the Citizens' Assembly's work.

The Special Committee so appointed shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and is also empowered:

(a) to appoint of their number one or more sub-committees and to refer to such sub-committees any of the matters referred to the Committee;

(b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;

(c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and

(d) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House on the matters referred to the Committee as soon as possible or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.

WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

On May 8, 2003, the Committee held its first meeting to review the nomination of Dr. Jack Blaney as the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. At this meeting, the nomination of Dr. Blaney was approved unanimously. The Committee then proceeded to present its first report to the Legislative Assembly recommending the appointment of Dr. Blaney.

Since the tabling of its first report, the Committee has held six additional meetings. The main purpose of four of these sessions was to review Dr. Blaney's subsequent selections of senior staff of the Citizens' Assembly—namely, director of operations, director of research, director of communications and associate director of communications. In addition, the Committee received interim reports on the progress of the work conducted by the Citizens' Assembly.

This report summarizes the work of the Committee in regard to the selection of the senior staff of the Citizens' Assembly and other matters related to the progress of the Assembly's work between mid-May and the end of November.

Minutes and transcripts of committee proceedings, as well as previous committee reports, are available at http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt. Additional information concerning the work of the Citizens' Assembly is available at http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/.

LIST OF MEETINGS

May 14, 2003	Victoria	Briefing
July 4, 2003	Vancouver	Briefing
July 28, 2003	Vancouver	Briefing
September 24, 2003	Vancouver	Briefing
November 20, 2003	Victoria	Briefing
November 27, 2003	Victoria	Deliberations

CONFIRMATION OF SENIOR STAFF

Selection Criteria for Senior Staff

The Committee met in Victoria on May 14, 2003 to review the selection process for senior staff developed by Dr. Blaney, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Before describing the criteria, Dr. Blaney proceeded to outline three tests that the Citizens' Assembly must pass to be considered successful: it must be independent of government, it must provide to the public both the perception and the reality of fairness of deliberations, and it must demonstrate competence in undertaking research and organizing deliberations.

Dr. Blaney then identified six qualifications sought in potential candidates for the positions of director of operations, director of research and director of communications. First, he was interested in a prospective candidate's track record in the respective fields of organizational management, academic research, or communications. Second, a candidate would be assessed on their ability to work without bias on the complex issue of electoral reform. Dr. Blaney stressed that he was seeking candidates "preferably with no strong position but absolutely...(with) no highly known public position on electoral reform." The other qualifications were integrity, people skills, flexibility with respect to hours of work, and "boundless energy."

Members asked several questions relating to the hiring of the senior staff. In particular, they requested information on the academic credentials for the senior staff positions and on the extent of the Committee's ability to vet the Chair's choice of senior staff.

In response, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly anticipated that the director of research position would likely require a PhD with demonstrated research skills. Dr. Blaney suggested that the other senior staff positions (director of operations and director of communications) would likely require a university degree, but that he would be open to hiring people with comparable employment experience.

Regarding the second inquiry, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly indicated that while he was responsible for filling the senior staff positions, the Committee would have an opportunity to confirm the nominations of senior staff.

Subsequently, the Committee unanimously endorsed the selections of

- Dr. Leo Perra, director of operations (July 4, 2003 meeting)
- Dr. R. Kenneth Carty, director of research (July 28, 2003 meeting)
- Marilyn Jacobsen, director of communications (September 24, 2003 meeting)
- Don MacLachlan, associate director of communications (September 24, 2003 meeting).

OTHER MATTERS

DELEGATE SELECTION PROCESS

The Chair of the Citizens' Assembly reported on a regular basis on the activities related to the selection process for the 158 delegates. The first phase involved working with Elections BC to register voters on the voters list. Using the updated list, Elections BC proceeded to stratify the voters list by constituency and then by gender. From this list, 200 letters (100 to males and 100 to females) were randomly sent out to citizens in each of the province's 79 ridings. Citizens receiving letters were then invited to attend regional meetings to randomly select two delegates to the Citizens' Assembly: one male and one female.

At its July 4, 2003 meeting, the Committee was provided with information on the Citizens' Assembly's work on updating the voters list. Members also learned that the Citizens' Assembly was developing an informational brochure to be delivered to every household in British Columbia, and that a targeted advertising campaign was being developed to encourage youth and aboriginal voters to register with Elections BC.

After hearing about the processes used to date to select the 158 delegates, several Members expressed concerns that certain segments of the population could be underrepresented. In particular, committee members asked whether the process was inclusive enough in its selection of youth, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.

In response, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly stated that Elections Canada, Elections BC and BC Stats were working together to develop a voters list that would be stratified by constituency, age and gender. From this modified list, 200 randomly-selected individuals would be sent information on the workings and eligibility requirements of the Assembly. The selected individuals would then be asked to self-identify as possible delegates for their respective constituency and attend a regional selection meeting. If more than 20 people responded favorably to the invitation to attend the regional meeting, a stratified random draw would be used to select the 20 participants in the constituency. At the meeting, the candidates would randomly select two men and two women to fill the delegate and alternate positions.

At the September 24 meeting, the Committee learned that the staff of the Citizens' Assembly was experiencing some difficulty in attracting the requisite number of responses (20) for constituency deliberations in a few northern BC ridings. To deal with this situation, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly reported that arrangements had been made with Elections BC to ensure that an adequate pool of potential delegates and alternates would be obtained at the constituency level.

On November 20th, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly reported that delegate selection was going smoothly. In response, some committee members inquired again whether the delegate profile sufficiently mirrored the population of British Columbia. The Chair of the Citizens' Assembly answered that the age distribution of the Citizens' Assembly was "not bad." (See Appendix A). Dr. Blaney stated that First Nations peoples had attended the delegate selection meetings, however, none of the delegates to date have self-identified as being of First Nations descent. Persons with visible disabilities had also attended the delegate selection meetings, but were not selected in the random selection of delegates.

Another inquiry of committee members related to the time commitment involved with the Citizens' Assembly process. In particular, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly was asked how his staff would deal with people dropping out during the year-long process, and the ramifications for constituency representation.

The Chair of the Citizens' Assembly responded that riding representation was used only to stratify the voters list: once selected to the Assembly, citizens would represent the interests of the province and not their individual constituencies. The Chair of the Assembly also noted that the rules of operation permit alternates from the affected constituencies to become involved, should a member drop out. As of November 20, 2003, two delegates have withdrawn and one delegate has passed away. Alternates have been chosen to fill these vacancies.

Communications Plan

On September 24, 2003, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly notified the Committee that due to financial constraints, he would not be able to fully implement the Assembly's initial communications plan. In order to deal with a projected budgetary shortfall, the Citizens' Assembly would not proceed with mailing out three planned province-wide householder brochures, providing updates to the public on the progress of the Assembly. Instead, Dr. Blaney stated that updates on research, deliberations and the status of the Assembly's final report would be made available on line, with hard copies mailed on requested.

At subsequent meetings, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly reported on the excellent media coverage from major daily and community newspapers, including proposals for special supplemental sections. Between September 1, 2003 and November 20, 2003, for example, the news media had carried more than 150 stories on the Citizens' Assembly's delegate selection and operational processes.

Delegate and Public Education

At the November 20th meeting, Members learned details of the learning phase for the 158 delegates of the Citizens' Assembly. They heard that the development of education modules for distribution to the delegates was on target. The staff of the Citizens' Assembly was working closely with experts from Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria to ensure materials presented to delegates are both comprehensive and yet easy to understand. The Citizens' Assembly has also hired facilitators from universities in the lower mainland to assist delegates in understanding the materials presented and to assist in promoting discussion. The Chair of the Citizens' Assembly also indicated that a secure website is being developed to allow delegates to share information internally.

With respect to public education, the Citizens' Assembly has made available to teachers lesson plans and learning materials on the Assembly's work. These materials are designed to supplement the Grade 11 social studies curriculum, which has a sizeable unit on the parliamentary system and electoral systems. In addition, Citizens' Assembly staff has presented a workshop at the BC Social Studies Teachers Association annual conference. These learning materials, as well as news releases and additional information are available online at the newly revamped Citizens' Assembly website.

In Spring 2004, the research staff of the Citizens' Assembly intends to present an academic research paper at the British Columbia Political Science Association conference. The theme of the conference is based around the Citizens' Assembly initiative, and will be held at Kwantlen University College in Richmond.

Public Hearing Process

Members inquired into the format contemplated for the public hearing phase of the Citizens' Assembly, and asked the Chair to ensure that a diversity of voices would be heard. In addition, the Committee requested that the Citizens' Assembly staff produce a backgrounder summarizing the submissions made by groups and individuals during the public hearing process and make it available to the delegates of the Citizens' Assembly.

CHAIR OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY'S PROGRESS REPORT

At the meeting on November 20, 2003, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly presented the Committee with a very positive assessment of the progress made to date towards creating a unique consultative mechanism for deliberating upon electoral reform. In particular, he praised "the clarity and wisdom" of the original Gibson Report on electoral reform and "the courage of the government" to bring forward such a socially innovative initiative.

Dr. Blaney also complimented the Legislative Assembly for making some important and helpful amendments to the Gibson recommendations and giving unanimous approval to the legislation setting up the Citizens' Assembly. The Special Committee on the Citizens' Assembly and Electoral Reform was also singled out for contributing both good advice and affirmation of the Assembly's independence.

As well, Dr. Blaney applauded the excellent services of Election BC and the Ministry of Attorney General as well as his own staff, who have come together to serve the objectives and the members of the Citizens' Assembly. He acknowledged too the very supportive media, which are taking news of the Citizens' Assembly to all regions of the province

His final compliment was reserved for the enormous enthusiasm and goodwill of the citizens of British Columbia— all those who have volunteered to serve the Assembly, as well as those who ultimately were selected to be members of the Citizens' Assembly.

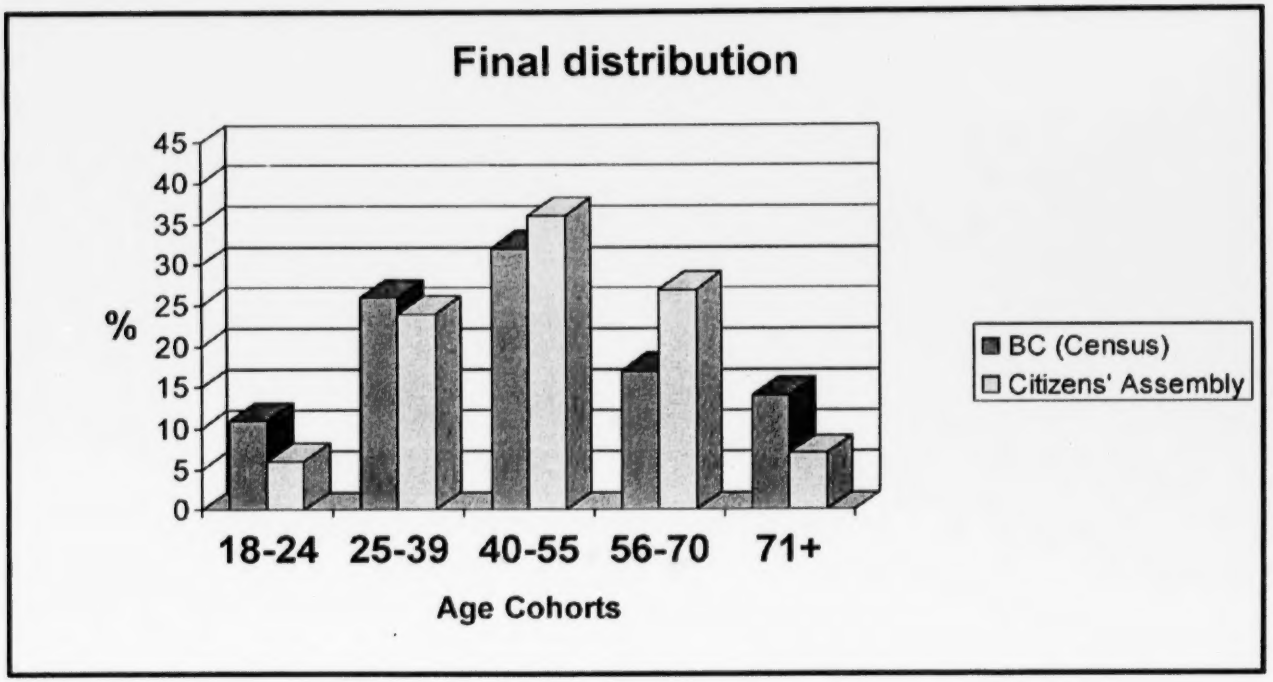
CONCLUSIONS

The Committee concurs with the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly's assessment of the progress made to date in creating an innovative, made-in-BC method for citizens to actively decide the future of the province's electoral system.

In regard to its own mandate, the Committee is satisfied with the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly's selections of senior staff positions and is pleased to hear that the anticipated costs of the Citizens' Assembly are on budget.

The Committee is also satisfied with the outcome of the delegate selection process. We are particularly pleased to see that the membership of the Citizens' Assembly will be balanced in terms of gender representation. In addition, we are generally satisfied that a diversity of age groups, cultures and life experiences will be represented when the Assembly first meets on January 10, 2004.

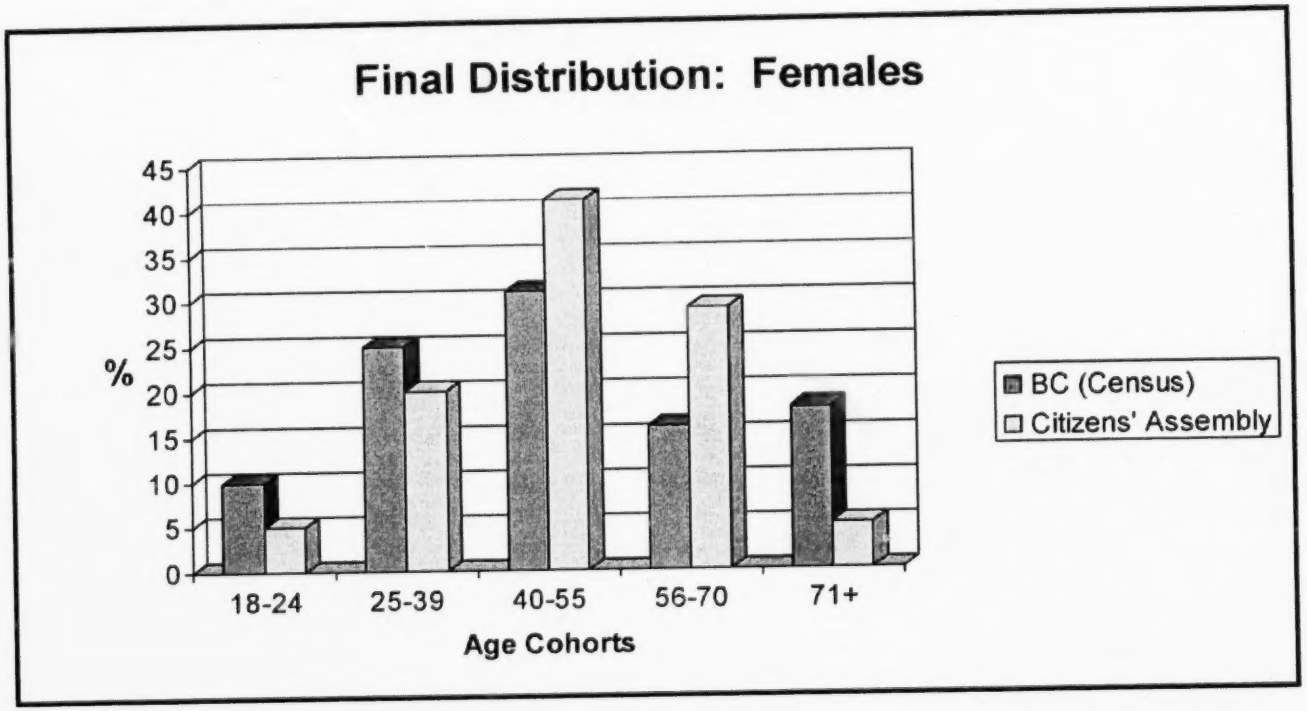
Comparison of BC and Citizens' Assembly: Distribution by Age Cohorts



Source: Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Power Point File, ComparisonNA.ppt, November 26, 2003.

APPENDIX A

Comparison of BC and Citizens' Assembly: Distribution by Age Cohorts



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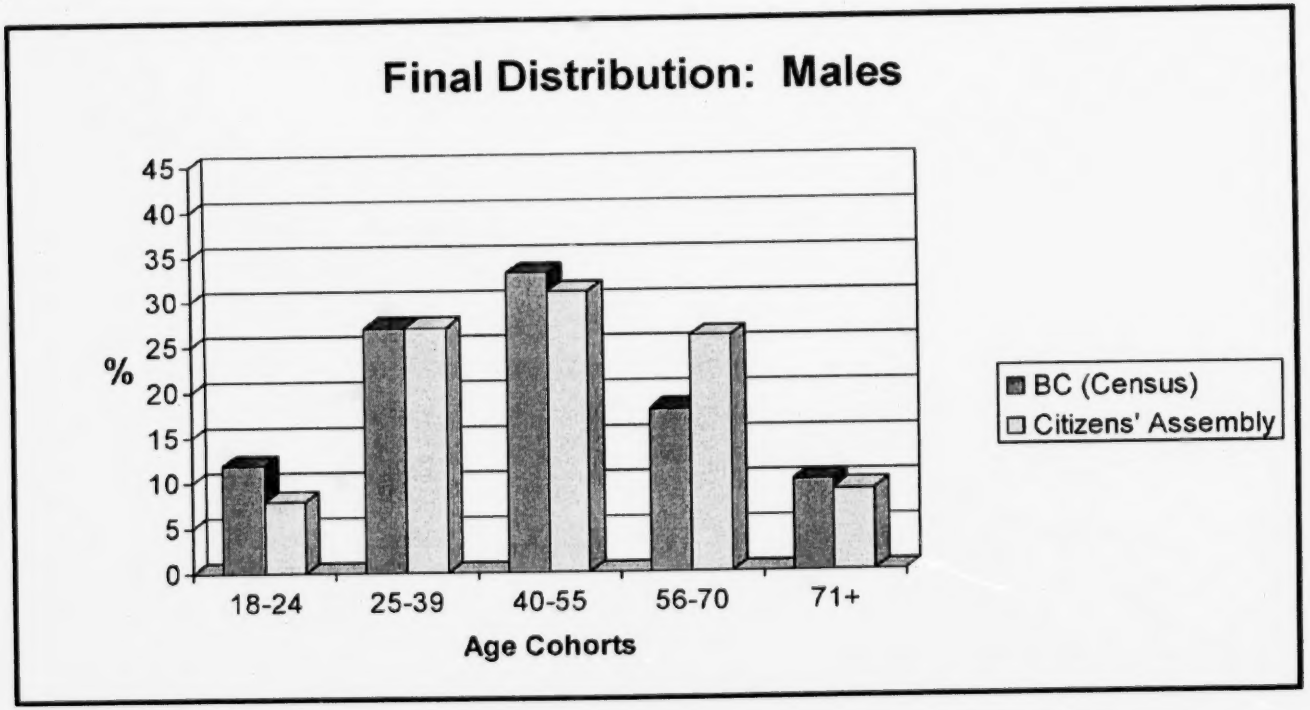

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